

“Conservation hunting; African-style”

Shooters and Fishers Party Chairman Robert Borsak, says there is a lack of understanding in Australia, about the culling of rogue, crop raiding elephants in Africa, under carefully managed Problem Animal Control programs.

Mr Borsak, who is also a member of the NSW Parliament, said he was disappointed at the "political" criticism of his safari trip several years ago, in which he shot one of these problem elephants.

He posted an account of his trip on a hunting website nearly four years ago, where it sat without comment or controversy until it was pointed out to the mainstream metropolitan media, which then decided to make it an issue.

Mr Borsak said there were some relevant facts that people should be aware of before they criticised him.

"The first point to make is that elephants are not an endangered species in southern Africa.

"There are about 100,000 in Zimbabwe alone, where they compete with subsistence farmers, who survive on an annual income of less than \$100 a year.

"Zimbabwe is an impoverished country, about half the size of New South Wales, and most villagers rely on subsistence crops of maize, cotton, melons, sorghum and in some cases, bananas. You can imagine what damage a rogue or problem elephant can cause to these crops.

"Elephants also kill many rural Zimbabweans each year, and I have personally seen the devastation caused by elephants and cape buffalo to village huts and crops.

"They go into the crops, generally at night, and while the villagers try to keep guard, and beat pots and pans in an effort to drive them away, their efforts mostly fail, and indeed if they enrage the animals, they are often trampled.

"Because of this problem, the authorities in Zimbabwe developed the local Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRES) program.

"This program charges international hunters a fee to humanely shoot the elephants destroying the crops, and then utilising the meat, and hides of the beasts to fund local projects. Importantly, it should be noted that hunters do not retain any tusks, hides or meat.

"This unique program helps supports schools, health clinics and drought relief in the depressed rural provinces in Zimbabwe.

"CAMPFIRES is a perfect example of an indigenous program benefitting grass roots work in these impoverished communities.

"A Biodiversity Conservation study found that between 1989 and 2006, CAMPFIRE income, mostly from safari hunting, totalled nearly USD\$30 million, of which 52 per cent was allocated specifically to the sub-district wards and villages for community projects and household benefits, and to compensate villagers for damage" he said.

Mr Borsak said The IUCN, renowned as the World Conservation Union is clearly right to suggest that the "challenge facing conservation organisations in Africa is to become self sufficient by developing strategies where revenue raised from the sustainable use of rhinos can be used to offset their high conservation cost. Successful conservation of Africa's wildlife cannot be separated from the lives of its people".

Mr Borsak said the concept has also been supported by New Scientist Magazine.

"Hunting can be a positive force they say because it provides an economic motive for maintaining wildlife habitats. "Without hunting, many of these would be converted to cattle pasture, and there would be a rapid loss of wildlife" says Peter Lindsey, a conservation biologist at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare."

And in the same edition in the Editorial:

"Sad it may be, but the balance of evidence is that trophy hunting can help conserve threatened species and their habitats, so for people who care about the fate of wildlife, the real question is not whether to allow hunting, but how to manage it. Done properly, trophy hunting can provide a source of jobs and income, and thus give local communities a reason to protect wildlife and habitats that might other-wise be sacrificed to rural villagers' need to put meat on the table."

Mr Borsak said he was fortunate enough to be able to spend a significant amount of money to visit Zimbabwe to hunt, and was always accompanied by a professional guide, who takes him from village to village to track down the rogue animals causing problems.

"Another factor is that many of the hunts are in tsetse-fly areas, where the locals cannot keep cattle, and therefore many do not get protein in the form of meat. The local wildlife however, is immune to the fly.

"The elephants culled are immediately utilised by the locals communities, and hundreds of people benefit from the meat. Not only is it sound conservation, it is also a humanitarian initiative

"If one puts dollar figures to the immediate benefits to the local people from these safaris, US\$2,550 cash per elephant, goes directly to the local village, plus the benefit of the elephant meat. The local outfitter benefits by nearly US\$11,000 to employ up to a dozen local villagers for each expedition.

"What disappoints me most is that many people have simply attacked me without even seeking to determine what circumstances were involved in the culling of a rogue elephant," he said.

"If I have anything to regret, it is perhaps the show of hubris on my part when reporting the hunt. Hunting these animals is a dangerous business, and perhaps I should have been more circumspect when I described the hunt"

"I welcome any reasonable debate on this issue to point out that rogue elephants do pose a threat to the local communities and the money does not go to Robert Mugabe, but to the local communities most affected by the problems," he said.

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Capt: (DSC_0185): Subsistence village in rural Zimbabwe. There are 100,000 elephants in Zimbabwe, an impoverished country half the size of NSW.

Capt: (DSC01061): After the hunt: "Once we shoot one of these elephants, the locals turn up in their hundreds to get the meat."

apt: (DSC_0177): Children in a rural village in Zimbabwe where CAMPFIREs is operating: "Monies from the Program helps support schools, health clinics, and drought relief in rural Zimbabwe."